Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa to be launched Friday at ceremonies throughout Africa, Europe and UN Headquarters in New York.

* Secretary-General expresses deep concern over funding provision in draft resolutions on MICIVIH and MINUGUA before the General Assembly.

* Poverty and its special implications for women are focus of discussions as Commission on Status of Women continues 40th session.

* Secretary-General encouraged by first round of elections in Sierra Leone; expresses concern at reports of armed attacks against civilians.

* Secretary-General appoints Thomas Hammarberg of Sweden as Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia.

* Disarmament Commission to discuss arms transfers in 1996 session in April.

* UNHCR and UNICEF to promote coordinated responses in areas of joint concern.

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The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa is to be launched Friday at ceremonies throughout Africa, Europe and United Nations Headquarters in New York. The unprecedented Special Initiative is described as a $25 billion programme of concrete actions to accelerate African development. It aims over a 10-year period, to greatly expand basic education and health care, promote peace and better governance, and improve water and food security. It also involves a year-long mobilization of political commitment and support for Africa.

The multi-billion dollar decade-long initiative represents about 20 per cent of the current level of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), according to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Speaking to correspondents on the eve of the launching of the initiative, she said it was not expected that the funding would new money. ODA was on the decline, competition for resources was intense and it would to be difficult to pool large sums in additional resources for Africa. What was expected was within existing levels of aid, there will be reallocation to these particular activities, not only on the part of Africa itself, but on the part of multilateral institutions.

The Initiative will be launched during a ceremony at UN Headquarters. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali is expected to address the ceremony via a live satellite link from Geneva and joined by World Bank President Wohlfensen from Washington, D.C.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed deep concern over two draft resolutions before the General Assembly. One relates to the International Civilian Mission to Haiti (MICIVIH) and the other to the UN Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA). They ask the Secretary-General to fund the extended mandates of MICIVIH and MINUGUA within existing resources. A UN Spokesman said today that the Secretary-General's concern is contained in a letter to the President of the General Assembly.

This is coming at a time when the Secretary-General is still scrambling to identify ways to make the reductions necessary to bring expenditures down to $1.3 billion a year as approved by the General Assembly in the last budget, the Spokesman said. She pointed out that it was a zero growth budget and has meant significant reductions in staff and other costs and it was not easy to meet those. In his letter the Secretary-General referred to these budget reductions and said, these gave him almost no flexibility at all. He said he was worried that he would only be able to implement the additional mandate if the General Assembly decided which existing programmes he should curtail, postpone or terminate.

Both missions - MICIVIH and MINUGUA, were operations that went to the heart of the purposes for which the United Nations was created, the Dr. Boutros-Ghali said. The human rights missions whose futures were at stake had been established to help bring to an end long standing conflicts and create conditions for a lasting peace for the peoples of the countries concerned. He said these missions responded to the wish of Member States that the highest priority be given to preventive and peacemaking activities which were less costly remedies than peacekeeping operations.

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Poverty and its special implications for women were the focus of discussions as the Commission on the Status of Women continued its 40th session. A panel of experts from governments, the World Bank and women's grass-roots organizations examined a wide range of issues, including the way gender inequities hampered economic development and the role of non-governmental organizations in channelling aid directly to poor women. They also stressed the vital importance of equal access to credit.

The Commission, which monitors implementation of the recommendations of the 4th World Conference on Women is holding discussions examining poverty, women and the media, and child and dependent care including sharing of responsibilities between men and women This experimental approach is aimed at allowing governments, United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and the media discuss practical implementation issues. At the end of its two-week session, the Commission is expected to approve "agreed conclusions" which will have the same strength as a resolution.

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The Secretary-General has sent a message to the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council in Sierra Leone Brigadier-General Julius Bio. Noting that he was encouraged by the first round of elections that took place on 26 and 27 February, Dr. Boutros-Ghali said he was also pleased to note that the second round of presidential elections would take place on 15 March as scheduled. As none of the

candidates received 55 per cent of the votes required to be elected there will be a run-off election, a UN Spokesman said.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali however, was concerned by reports of continued armed attacks against innocent civilians. He appealed to the Chairman and to his administration to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the civilian population from intimidation and attacks by elements hostile to the democratic process so that the electoral process could be completed in a free and fair manner.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has decided to appoint Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg of Sweden as Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia. Ambassador Hammarberg has in-depth experience in the fields of human rights and development as well as first-hand experience of human rights issues in Southeast Asia. He is currently Ambassador and Special Adviser to the Swedish Government on Humanitarian Issues. He succeeds Justice Michael Kirby, who has been appointed to the Australian High Court.

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The Disarmament Commission is to hold its 1996 session for two weeks from 22 April. An organization meeting of the Commission has finalized three specific items for the provisional agenda of the session - international arms transfers, with particular reference to General Assembly resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991. That resolution called upon States to accord high priority to eradicating illicit trade in weapons and military equipment, which it defines as that trade which evades the control of national or international authorities. The other two issues to be discussed will be the proposed fourth special session of the General Assembly on Disarmament and nuclear issues.

The Commission is a deliberative body with universal membership and was mandated by the Assembly to make recommendations on disarmament issues.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) will promote coordinated responses in areas of joint concern. Under a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at further strengthening coordination, the two Agencies defined the beneficiary populations covered by them as refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and affected local populations.

The Memorandum signed by the UNHCR Sadako Ogata and UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, also covers advocacy, promotion and strategy-formulation roles, particularly with regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as operational and integration and rehabilitation activities.

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